

# Rapid Response, Successful eradication? *Chrysopogon Aciculatus* at Homestead Air Reserve Base

by Andrew Derksen, FDACS/DPI

*Chrysopogon aciculatus*, or golden beardgrass, is a federally listed noxious weed. The rapidly growing grass has a distinctive “purple Christmas tree” shaped inflorescence, and gangly rhizomes that fade to a yellow shade, giving it the name. While the rapid growth has led to its use as a tool for erosion prevention in central Asia, it is considered a weed in pastures. The viciously hooked seeds can cause ulcerating wounds in the mouths and feet of livestock and in the calves of unprotected hikers. It was first detected in Florida in September 2012 when Keith Bradley and Sarah Martin of the Institute for Regional Conservation (IRC) identified the weed in two patches along the southern runway of Homestead Air Reserve Base. Populations of the grass were only identifiable by their seed heads, making detection difficult. The rhizomal and blade characteristics were hard to separate from the mix of other nonnative grasses growing at the base. Reduced mowing might have allowed for a larger proportion of the grass to go to seed, making it easier to identify—but this management option was not available. Certain other nonnative grasses would grow more rapidly, beginning to obscure the runway for pilots and encouraging bird habitat—increasing the likelihood of bird-jet collisions. ECISMA’s exotic weed rapid response team struck immediately, treating the two confirmed sites. With the

assistance of USDA wildlife management personnel stationed at the base, NPS exotic weed management personnel, FDACS plant inspectors and pest surveyors, IRC led another survey through the area, identifying two more sites and expanding the treated area.

Monthly surveys conducted by IRC and USDA wildlife management staff failed to uncover additional populations of the weed at the airbase on the runway or at any other location on base. IRC will continue to search for it within the perimeter of the base and at other IRC work sites in south Florida, but cautiously suggests that the population may have been successfully eradicated. While it is unlikely that few seeds of the grass would survive the required regular mowing, it remains possible that the plant could have grown and blown seeds into the surrounding ornamental plant nurseries before being mown. Repeated inspections of planted material at the palm nurseries surrounding the airbase by FDACS have not revealed additional populations of the weed. A volunteer workday with ECISMA staff to further examine planted areas surrounding the base may be in order to increase confidence in our continued non-detection of the weed, but the rapid interagency collaboration in this matter may well have eradicated this grass before it could become established in south Florida.



Sarah Martin and Shane McKinley spraying *Chrysopogon aciculatus* with 5% Rodeo plus water and blue dye. Photo credit: IRC



Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area

eCISMA was created to formalize cooperation among land management agencies to improve the effectiveness of exotic species control by sharing information, innovation and technology across borders through a memorandum of understanding with the ultimate goal of helping to ensure the success of the Comprehensive everglades Restoration Plan.

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## agency/Organization abbreviations

Dol - Department of Interior  
eel (miami-Dade County) - environmentally endangered lands  
fDACS/DPI - florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services / Division of Plant Industry  
fWC - florida fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
IRC - Institute for Regional Conservation  
PRoS (miami-Dade County) - Parks, Recreation, and open Spaces  
NPS - National Park Service  
SfWmD - South florida Water management District  
TNC - The Nature Conservancy  
uf - university of florida  
uSDA - u.S. Department of Agriculture  
uSfWS - u.S. fish and Wildlife Service